

# OFFICE OF SAFETY MANAGEMENT

*Devens Reserve Forces Training Area*

## SAFETY BULLETIN - RABIES

May 2005

If you've read a local newspaper or seen a TV news broadcast lately, you've probably seen a story about a rabid animal roaming in a neighborhood that either attacked a house pet or a child. So this is a good time to review some facts about rabies.

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that attacks the brain and spinal cord. Although rare in humans, rabies can be common in wildlife such as raccoons, skunks, bats, woodchucks and foxes. It is very rare among small rodents like squirrels, rats, mice or chipmunks and non-existent in fish, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

The rabies virus lives in the saliva and nervous tissues of infected animals and is spread when they bite or scratch. It can also be spread if the saliva from an infected animal comes in contact with broken skin or open wounds. In caves crowded with bats, it may be possible to inhale the virus floating on bat saliva in the air.

So how can you tell if an animal is rabid? Because the virus affects their brain, animals will often behave strangely if infected. They may attack people or other animals for no reason or they may lose their fear of people and seem to be unnaturally friendly.

If you've been bitten or scratched by an animal that has been acting odd, immediately wash the wound the soap and water for at least 10 minutes. Call your local Board of Health and health care provider; they can help you decide if you need to be treated for rabies. Also contact your local Animal Control Officer. If your pet was bitten or scratched, put on gloves and follow the steps above contacting your veterinarian instead of your own doctor.

If it's determined that you need treatment for rabies, you will be given 2 medications. One, rabies immune globulin (RIG), contains antibodies to fight the virus and is given once. The second is rabies vaccine, which provides long-lasting protection and is given as a series of 5 shots over the course of a month. To be effective, the medications should begin as soon as possible after the bite or scratch.

Some prevention tips...avoid wild animals and report any animal that is acting strangely to your animal control officer; do not handle dead, sick or injured wildlife (if you absolutely must, use gloves and a shovel to avoid direct contact); make sure your pets are vaccinated and kept in at night and keep the lids on your trash cans (garbage attracts animals looking for a meal).



BARBARA REICHERT  
Safety Director

# SAFETY BULLETIN